1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

842 183 quite explicit, and married couples are supposed to want children. Those few women who admitted to me, confidentially, not wanting children had very high divorce records, while all others conformed to expectations when asked specifically concerning their desire for offspring.

842 Traditionally the Kanuri believe that conception results from simultaneous orgasm during sexual intercourse. This information I got from older men who do not, however, know in any detail when or how often such an event actually takes 843 place. Instead they reason that it has occurred when their wife reports a pregnancy. [842] When a woman is over one month late in a menstrual cycle (a few said forty-five days) conception is suspected, and she begins to buy charms on the market to safeguard a normal gestation. During this initial period the husband and wife, ideally at least, should not speak of the pregnancy to anyone until at least the second menstrual period has been missed, and then only to their very close friends and relatives. Such talk, indeed any excess conversation about the pregnancy, is believed to be dangerous to the course and development of a normal pregnancy. Even during the later stages just before birth only very cryptic references are made by the parents when they refer to the coming event. Pregnancy, like a number of other occa- [984] sions in one's lifetime, is considered a very fragile time, a time when an individual is vulnerable to maliciousness from humans or spirits. Because it is difficult to know about such maliciousness, until after its effects are felt, it is better to avoid mentioning the susceptible circumstances.

[833] Sexual intercourse is continued throughout pregnancy since the Kanuri believe that such activity makes for an easier labor at birth by keeping the passage open and providing fluids for the child and the mother.

Although the Kanuri recognize the pregnancy period of nine months, the woman continues her normal work until the lying-in period is signaled by labor. On the other hand exceptions to the nine-month period occur, and some women claim to have been pregnant for years although no outward sign is visible. This latter condition is referred to as *bənji*, that is to say an embryo that will not come out of the womb. A woman may miss a menstrual cycle once and then become convinced that she has conceived. If her conviction holds she may, after menstruating again, diagnose the condition as a *bənji*. Missing a menstrual period, however, is not absolutely necessary for the diagnosis. Women who spoke of having *bənji* felt that any woman could have one, but they also agreed that in their experience the woman was usually older and either had not given birth for a long time or had had a completely infertile marriage history. Certainly many Kanuri women seem to be barren, and this cultural belief must help to assuage the disappointment of a hopeful but sterile woman. It may also serve to alleviate the loss of womanly role for an older woman who sees herself being replaced in her reproductive functions by her husband's younger wives.

Birth

844 When the woman is about to give birth, she is assisted by her own mother if she is in the vicinity, or her mother-in-law if she is living with her husband's family, and sometimes by a specialist in midwifery. There are stories told about